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ABSTRACT

Teachers would find their jobs easier if they had a set of positive statements to communicate classroom rules to students rather than the frequently used "Don't Rules." "Do Rules" are behavioral objectives for use in the area of classroom behaviors. They are most effective when they state exactly what is to be done in a situation. The rules are specific and concrete, for example: "Walk in the classroom and halls: run on the playground" as opposed to "Don't Run." It is also useful to provide students with several choices of appropriate behavior, and students should be encouraged to help write the rules. A list of suggestions is given for writing "Do Rules." (JD)

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DO RULES

We live in a "Don't" oriented culture. Again and again we are told what not to do.

NO SMOKING! NO LEFT TURN!

We are often reprimanded or punished for doing what we were not supposed to do or not doing what we were supposed to do.

SPEEDING TICKET MEMO: KEEP YOUR CLASS QUIET AT LUNCH!

In school students are often told what not to do. Lists of "Don'ts" are posted.

1. DON'T GET OUT OF YOUR SEAT WITHOUT PERMISSION
2. DON'T TALK TO YOUR NEIGHBOR WITHOUT PERMISSION
3. DON'T RUN IN THE CLASSROOM

One thing these lists may accomplish is to suggest activities that students can "try out" on the teacher. "Yesterday, when I got out of my seat she yelled at me." "I wonder what would happen if I were to talk to my neighbor?"

Teachers would find their jobs easier if they had a set of positive statements to communicate classroom rules to students. These statements could be called "Do Rules". "Do Rules" are, in fact, behavioral objectives in the area of classroom behavior.

"Do Rules" are most effective when they state exactly what is to be done in a situation. They are specific and concrete.

WALK IN THE CLASSROOMS AND HALLS: RUN ON THE PLAYGROUND
as opposed to: Don't run

SHARPEN YOUR PENCILS BEFORE THE SECOND BELL RINGS
instead of: Don't sharpen your pencils during class.

PLEASE KEEP YOUR FOOD ON YOUR PLATE UNLESS IT IS ON THE WAY TO YOUR MOUTH
as an alternative to: Don't throw food

TOUCH OTHERS ONLY WHEN YOU ARE BEING FRIENDLY
instead of: Don't hit others

It is useful to provide students with several choices of appropriate behavior.

WHEN YOU HAVE COMPLETED AND TURNED IN YOUR TEST PAPER YOU MAY TAKE OUT YOUR BOOK AND READ, PUT YOUR HEAD DOWN AND REST, COUNT THE TILES IN THE CEILING, OR SMILE

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"Do Rules" are often more effective and easier to implement if the students help write them. The students are often concerned with problem areas about which teachers are unaware. Helping develop and impliment the rules gives students a greater feeling of involvement in the functioning of the classroom and helps develop a relationship of mutual respect between teacher and students.

It takes practice for both teachers and students to learn to state rules positively -- we have had a lot of practice stating "Don'ts" It is usually easier and more effective to start by listing "Don'ts" which can then be rephrased as "Do Rules". Skill at stating "Do Rules" is usually developed quickly. It can be fun finding creative ways of stating rules positively and often the resulting rules may be humorous -- humor seems to enhance the effectiveness of the rules.

PLEASE KEEP YOUR FEET ON THE FLOOR UNLESS YOU ARE AN INSECT

The vast majority of teachers who institute "Do Rules" in their classrooms report great success in reducing inappropriate behavior. Many teachers are also pleased by the more positive atmosphere that results. Teachers enhance the effectiveness of "Do Rules" by training themselves to notice the students who are behaving appropriately.

I LIKE THE WAY JOHN AND SALLY AND JIM AND NANCY ARE SITTING IN THEIR SEATS READY TO BEGIN

Notice each student as he/she demonstrates appropriate behavior. This is harder than it sounds -- since we are a mistake oriented culture overly aware of weaknesses rather than strengths. (Dreikurs, 1964) Teachers need to learn to view mistakes as opportunities to try again.

Many teachers report that they feel much better at the end of the day after switching to this approach. Their throats feel less raw and they feel more relaxed and effective. They like themselves and their students better.

To make the "Do Rules" approach a permanent part of their teaching some people find it necessary to change their perspective on life. Most people surveyed indicate that when they reflect on a day's events, they usually spend much more time thinking about what went wrong and the mistakes they made, then on their successes and accomplishments. This is a result of our mistake

oriented culture which pays more attention to and, therefore, causes most people to focus more on failure than on success. (Dreikurs 1964) If teachers are to effectively focus on the positive behavior of their students, they must learn to pay more attention to the positive parts of their own lives as well. When one gets a flat tire a positive observation is -- three tires remained inflated. Though that may be more Pollyanna view than most of us can maintain, there are many positive events, and avoidances of negative events in a person's life that often go unnoticed. Try this:

MAKE A LIST OF ALL THE EVENTS THAT WENT WELL DURING THE DAY. START SMALL WITH A GOAL OF LISTINGS THREE TO FIVE EVENTS PER DAY.

People usually find that with practice, their skills in noticing positive events will increase and that they are able to expand the list to 20 or more events per day. Think of how good that must feel!

There are, of course, negative events that are hard to deny or avoid. A positive focus can be helpful even in these situations. Instead of blaming and criticizing oneself for a mistake made in teaching, ask:

HOW MAY I PREVENT THIS SITUATION NEXT TIME?

WHAT ARE SOME ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO HANDLE THE SITUATION?

Excessive self-criticism often dooms a person to repeat his/her errors time after time -- this trap can be avoided with a more positive approach.

When a student makes an error while working on a problem or answering a question, look for the logic in the response.

WHAT QUESTION IS THAT THE CORRECT ANSWER TO?

HOW CAN YOU FIND OUT IF YOUR ANSWER IS CORRECT?

THIS PART OF THE PROBLEM IS CORRECT

When grading papers give "C's" or points in place of "X's". It may take more time, but it is well worth the effort.

DO BEGIN TO NOTICE POSITIVE EVENTS TODAY!

REFERENCES

Dollar, B. Humanizing classroom discipline: A behavioral approach. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

Dreikurs, R., & Soltz, V. Children: The challenge. New York: Hawthorn, 1964.

'DO RULES FOR DO RULES"

1. Please check carefully to be certain that each do rule is stated positively. (Suggesting that a student "avoid" or refrain from a particular activity is considered to be a negative statement.)
2. Be sure to notice people who are following the rules. "I like the way Sally is . . ." or "Thank you for . . .", etc. Be certain to include noticing people following the rules in the write-up. You may also discuss any times when you noticed rule breaking behavior. Perfection usually takes a few months or decades. Do you notice any difference in response when you notice people following versus breaking the rules?
3. You may use any format that you find attractive or helpful. For example: "Please . . .", or "Do . . .", or "The class will function more smoothly if everyone will . . .", and so on.
4. It is highly recommended that only a few do rules be introduced at a time.
5. Rules are usually better accepted by the students if they are involved in writing them. That is, they work better.
6. Most teachers find it helpful to discuss the rules with their classes. Having students come up with reasons for the rules, ways of following the rules, and ways of helping others follow the rules are all beneficial.
7. It is usually helpful and effective to review the rules from time to time. If people are having difficulty following a rule a discussion and analysis of the reasons for the difficulty may be helpful. Be sure to regularly point out areas where individuals and/or the class are doing an expecially good job.
8. Some teachers find it helpful to have a student who has broken a rule state the rule, i.e., "Read me rule #4." I recommend only limited use of this strategy. If it doesn't work after 1 or 2 tries with a student, it probably won't work with him or her at all.
9. When something fails to work I assume that there is something wrong with the design of the system. I have developed these "do rules on do rules" because I am seeing too many problems with the "do rule" projects. I am sure I will need to refine and modify these suggestions over time.

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